

SENATE BILL 444- TESTIMONY OF Sharon K Howard APRN BC

House Business and Labor

"AN ACT REVISING ADVANCED PRACTICE REGISTERED NURSE TREATMENT OF INJURED WORKERS; AND AMENDING SECTION 39-71-116, MCA."

Introduced by Senator Dave Wanzenried

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Sharon K Howard. I am here today on behalf of my Advanced Practice Registered Nurse colleagues and injured workers. A great deal of my professional life has involved developing solutions to address the unmet health care needs of groups unable or unsuccessful in securing quality, cost effective health care. The injured worker is one more category of patients in need of advocacy and action to mitigate health care access problems and subsequent unmet care needs.

Great Falls has many fine health care providers, so statements delineating a lack of providers for injured workers may seem disingenuous. However, injured workers have a difficult time accessing quality, unbiased physical examinations, pain management, and health care advocacy. Many of these patients are adjusting to a serious injury, loss of income and at times the loss of employment and career. Worker compensation cases require excellent communication skills to interface with the insurer, patient, employer, physical therapy, chiropractor, mental health care providers, and specialists. A workers' compensation case can be time and labor intensive for a health care provider with marginal return in compensation.

Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) are educated and prepared to assume the case management duties in the health care system needed by injured workers. In many states, APRNs are already independently managing state worker's compensation patients. APRNs have clinically demonstrated the capacity to provide safe and responsible care to the patients they serve. They have expert knowledge and skills that allow them to provide high quality care to injured workers under the provisions of this statute. APRNs have been recognized through national studies as a cost effective source of high quality care.

SB 444 is an important step in assuring adequate health care access for injured workers. I urge a do pass on SB 444.